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THE MORAL GREATNESS

OF THE

TEMPERANCE ENTERPRISE.

A SERMON

BY THE

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SERMON.*

Joshua xvii. 17, 18.—“And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and hast great power; thou shalt not have one lot only: but the mountain shall be thine; for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down; and the outgoings of it shall be thine: for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong.”

THESE words of Israel's devout and gallant leader can only be applied to any modern enterprise by way of accommodation. But I think they contain a great and permanent principle, which is applicable to anything morally right, and at the same time hard of accomplishment. Joshua was dealing with a double tribe of great strength and resources, which wanted, according to its double numbers, double work and double inheritance; and he was at no loss to find work for them, suggesting it first in the woody mountain, among the Perizzites and the giants; and when Ephraim and Manasseh objected that even this was not large enough, or was virtually inaccessible, because guarded by those regions of the plain which had not yet been wrested from the Canaanites, and was defended by their chariots of iron, Joshua still holds them to their work by the argument of their capacities—for if they were so strong they must do something worthy of their prowess, in mountain or in plain, or in both; and thus fulfil the claim to greatness which they had put forth. This subject, then, will naturally lead me to

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speak of the greatness of the Temperance enterprise as a suitable field for the employment of all our energies ; and to this topic, therefore, in humble dependence on Divine help and grace, I would now seek to direct your attention.

The greatness, and chiefly the moral greatness of the Temperance enterprise, appears *first* in regard to the ends which it contemplates, and *secondly* in regard to the means which it employs ; and these I shall successively review.

I. In regard to the ends which it contemplates, the Temperance enterprise is *morally great*. Various elements may combine to make any work morally great ; and I do not mean to exhaust all that belong to the Temperance movement. But there are here at least three elements always demanded, where greatness is to be. There is a work in itself right and good ; there is sufficient largeness of scale ; and there is the presence of severe and stern difficulty. Out of these circumstances greatness is always born.

1. We have, to begin with, an end *morally right and good*, and that in eminent degree. No one can blame or even despise the ends contemplated by our effort, as either unrighteous or unkind. It is to restore to society the means and substance wasted on strong drink, excluding all the indigence, sloth, and pauperism which now oppress our land. It is to stop the great army of disease and death which pursues and finds its victims among the intemperate. It is to arrest or retrieve lunacy. It is to stay or turn back the tide of vice and crime. It is to repeal the awful sentence by precluding the sin which incurs it—"The drunkard shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Whose rights are invaded by such a deliverance ? Who will not call the rescue supremely kind—a very redemption for body and for soul, and all that is enslaved and ruined by the tremendous woe ? Even did we grant, for argument's sake, that it was wrong to fence men round against these evils by law, who could hold that it was wrong to do so by persuasion ? Were every

drunkard and moderate drinker utterly to cease from his indulgence, what atom of obligation would lie on him to continue it? There would not be one single claim of God or man to appeal to; whence we see that the Temperance cause fulfils at least one condition of moral greatness, that it usurps no sway, and brings no invasion upon truth and reason, which might possibly hinder its further claims to rank with the grand and commanding in moral enterprise. Whether its shaft rise high enough, its pedestal is clear to the base. It is at least fixed on the rock of moral integrity and unassailable right and liberty.

2. Another feature which exalts this remedy into greatness is *the stupendous prevalence of the evil*. It is hardly possible to exaggerate it; and only those who make an effort can conceive its vastness. The number of women alone apprehended annually in Edinburgh for being found in this shameful state would fill the Music Hall, or more than half this City Hall. The number of drunkards in the three kingdoms is calculated at about 600,000, or the population of all Glasgow. And it is so often repeated, that we can hardly forget it, that the sum spent on drink for the last year or two would be sufficient to pay off in five or six years our entire national debt. General facts like these do not impress with the force of incidents that one actually witnesses. I have seen the ravages of intemperance in every part of our land. Some years ago, near the far Land's End, a traveller by coach so persisted in descending to drink at every halting-place, that an accident could hardly be avoided. More recently, in the neighbourhood of Kendal, a gentleman, excited by drink, when the train was just starting, opened with a key a carriage door from the wrong side, and struggled through the passengers and out in the other direction, to the danger of his life. More recently, a sad and solitary father in the same compartment with me, had just come from the funeral

of a son who had fallen down in an inn in Scarborough, and left the only comfort behind that the impressions of better days seemed to have been revived by the prayers and tears of a pious aunt, who had nursed the unhappy youth till he passed away. A crowd of recollections of the same kind comes up to me. Only on Easter Tuesday, at the station of Durham, did I look on a crowd of excursionists, sadly out of keeping with the painful strike there which still continues. One evening last week, but in full light and in one of the best streets of Edinburgh, a young man—a gentleman in dress and manners—as I happened to be going to a temperance meeting, accosted me with disorderly cries. Within that interval I had in widely distant parts of the country sought out three young men, all once hopeful and bright, whose calamity had been connected in one way or other with the same destroyer. Facts like these are so common that they have almost ceased to impress us. We resign ourselves to them as to a kind of doom, which is inevitable. We are like the Athenians in the age of Philip, of whom Demosthenes said, that they treated that invading monarch like a sweeping storm of hail, every one looking up to it, as it darkened the sky, as to a fated evil, and only wishing that it might pass by, and not ravage his own fields. To repel an invasion like this, is surely great. To defy it, encounter it, and in God's name hurl it back, is, if it be possible, one of the noblest efforts in the world's history.

3. A still further feature, which enhances the greatness of this enterprise, is *its vast and peculiar difficulty*. There has hardly ever been undertaken a more arduous work than to change radically the customs and usages of society in regard to intoxicating liquors, especially when the sanction of law has to be added, as it needs at last to be, to the force of moral suasion. To sweep out clear and entire the whole of this debasing evil, which has penetrated into every region of our social existence, and left its deep mark

upon it, and to effect such a change, that, while strong drink may not be annihilated, it shall be hidden away in the dark undergrounds of human vice and crime, a reprobated and an outcast thing ; this is the revolution in opinion and in law which we contemplate and anticipate ; and who can be blind to its grievous and manifold difficulty ? It is not indeed so hard, as the spread of Christianity, especially in the missionary enterprise, which contemplates an inward renovation, and a turning of men from Satan unto God ; though the deepest victory of temperance will be, I firmly believe, associated with Christianity, and with its special influence. But formally considered, and in its more limited aim, the temperance reformation is liker the abolition of slavery, or the casting away of a dark and evil habit, without necessarily in all cases demanding the spiritual resurrection required by Christianity. Yet, as the bondage is so deep and direful, and as in its worst forms nothing but Christianity will ever break it, we may say that the temperance enterprise shares to a large extent with Christianity the glory of difficulty ; and thus what some regard as an objection, becomes to faith and hope an attraction and an incentive, since the things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Let us briefly sum up some of the difficulties in the way of the temperance cause. It has to fight against appetite, of which we all know the strength, and which in multitudes of cases is already created, and in others is being created, to rule with strong and blind power. It has to fight with habit, which in innumerable cases, where there is no special appetite, upholds, through the mere sway of use and wont, the conformity of men, women, and even children to drinking usages, even without thought and without reflection. Habit, indeed, would not have created our drinking usages without appetite ; and hence multitudes who care little or nothing for liquor, are the mere slaves of those who do.

and have not the independence or courage to break free. And there is another most formidable adversary, created by appetite and nursed by habit, till now it is so mighty as to stand upon its own claims and within its own entrenchments. I mean interest, the interest of a gigantic and organised traffic, which is watchful of every assault, and resolute against every curtailment, exerting enormous social and political power, and as a rule (I am happy to own that there are many exceptions), not apparently seeing much in the question, save interest alone. There is also to be contended with the power of law, fortifying this traffic as truly as regulating and so far restraining it, making it a licensed, public, national thing, propping itself up upon it for vast portions of the revenue, and thus girding it round with all the sanctity of a recognised and privileged institution of the land, which stands upon prerogative, and is entitled to forbearance, if not reward, for good service. Farther, along with these bulwarks of the usages and customs which we seek to destroy, there is a large amount of false sentiment, as if they were necessary to friendship, to hospitality, to the geniality and poetry of life, so that they have become interwoven with toast, with song, with occasions of joy, and passages of sorrow, and everything that diversifies existence with excitement or interest. And still more influential, because more prosaic and commonplace, is the vast body of loose but prevalent opinion which, without any romance or tenderness, associates these drinks in some mystic way with health, with capacity of work, with restorative power in sickness; and though this opinion is more and more discredited and undermined by the highest authorities, both as to seasons of health and illness, there is still an incredible amount of the old lingering superstition, which resists all the lessons of science, of experience, and of visible demonstrated connection between strong drink and disease, and holds to the old ways with a tenacity which nothing

but the reorganisation of the whole mental system seems able to relax. And lastly, needful simply to be touched on here as still an opposing influence, is the high moral and religious ground that virtue is hardly complete till it be exercised with abounding temptation, that intoxicating agents as creatures of God have a legitimate field of use in ordinary fellowship, a field which ought to become a discipline of higher principle than their rejection, and that the ardent and fiery drinks of the nineteenth century, though they absorb the resources, sap the morals, and endanger the religion of the church of our days, are still the legitimate successors of the wines of Palestine, and ought to be worked into the fabric of our Christian civilisation—by the superabounding grace of God—instead of being visited with exclusion and anathema.

With this miscellaneous and motley body of antagonists—appetites, habits, interests, laws, sentiments, opinions, religious traditions and impressions—none of them, perhaps, very exalted, but some certainly much higher than others, and all developing a formidable strength and resisting power, we are called upon to grapple; and surely whoever desires difficulty as an element of the morally great finds it here in no ordinary degree. We shall do nothing great if we do not realise the hardness of our task, and thus endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. But I am persuaded that though hard, the task is not insuperable. We may follow with confidence the pointing of Joshua, “The mountain shall be thine: for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down; the outgoings of it shall be thine.” Or we may say with his great comrade Caleb, “Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.”

II. I now come to the second head of this discourse, which is the moral greatness of the Temperance enterprise, as looked at in the light of the *means* which it employs. The elements of greatness which strike me most in the Tem-

perance enterprise on the side of its means are simplicity, efficacy, and largeness of sympathy. Of these in order.

1. The *first* thing which gives greatness to the means employed in the Temperance movement is *simplicity*. I am far from wishing to take a narrow view of the temperance method of cure, or to restrict it to the simple disuse of intoxicating drinks, with a view to banish them from society. There are many other elements wrought up with this, and justly, such as education, sanitary reform, innocent recreation, the use of music, temperance literature, and much besides. But the essence of the movement is the discontinuance and exclusion of strong drink as a beverage ; and while there are here the varieties of pledged and unpledged action, personal abstinence and universal banishment of liquor, the older abstinence and Templarism, general and church organisations, men's, women's, and children's associations, the nerve and sinew of the whole movement is the cessation of drinking as the cure of drunkenness. Now this is a very simple idea ; and hence it is a very great one. It is easily defined ; it is comprehensible ; it goes to the root of the evil. It chalks out a path in which all can walk, if they are willing ; nor are the minor diversities among those who resolve on discontinuance likely to divide them, for they all hold in their hands the broad principle, though some carry it farther than others. There is an immense advantage also in this principle or practice, that it is visible and fitted to strike and tell on the habits of society. A man may say, many a good man says, "I take very little ; I am almost a total abstainer ; indeed, practically one !" But I take leave to deny that he is so practically, in the sense in which the total abstainer is. It is not very easy to see when a man is taking little ; it is always visible when he is taking none. The act of the one arrests and penetrates ; the act of the other simply wants the edge that is necessary to make the blow leave a mark behind it. It was an immense simplification when all intoxi-

cating liquors were embraced in the excluded list, instead of only ardent spirits. This gave a bottom of clear distinction on which to stand; and though the work was made more extensive its simplicity really made it more easy. Similar to this is the simplicity of a man's position when he comes to say, "With these liquors I shall have no more intercourse. For me they must end; and my influence must be to end them everywhere. They are bound to go down; and the spot of earth over against my own door must now be clear from their presence." Who does not see the moral simplicity and power that lies in all this? The agreement of so many persons bound to this clear course by mutual understanding, an understanding avowed and known, will tell even beyond their numbers, and it will have a constant tendency to make a wide space around them, within which the horrors of drink have died out for want of nutriment, and are in the process of vanishing away. I honour, then, more than I can express, this clear and thorough-going principle of totality and finality. It has all the simplicity and sweep of great practical truths and discoveries. I firmly believe it to be a Divinely-sent remedy, and the only one, for the terrible evil with which it deals.

2. The *second* feature of greatness which I notice next to simplicity is *efficacy*. Who can deny that if men would only abstain from drink, drunkenness and all its frightful evils would cease? They cease to those who abstain, in so far as they do so; and is there anything to hinder the extension of the principle? No moral remedy is universal, except as men are willing to use it. The Gospel itself does not reveal its power save to those who put it to the test. It is enough, therefore, to make the temperance remedy great, that it cannot fail in any case where it is fairly used. No doubt it may be replied that even moderation is in the same sense a remedy, for if everybody would practise it there would be no excess. But the cases are evidently very

different. The practice of moderation, as a matter of fact, always leaves a sad residue, who pass from moderation to drunkenness ; the practice of temperance, as a matter of fact, does not create a single drunkard. There is no tendency in abstinence to stir up latent evil ; whereas in moderation this tendency cannot be denied. Hence all agree that for the drunkard there is no rational cure but abstinence ; and though abstinence fails in the sense that all who begin do not persist in it, yet no one can honestly hold that the drunkard would have the same chance of persisting if he began again on the scheme of moderation. The practical sense of men decides thus for the efficacy of abstinence when prejudice is set aside. Is there almost a single father or mother, that would not rejoice to hear, as a fresh security, that a son hitherto sober had become abstinent ? whereas in the case of a son already fallen the news would be the only gleam of hope—in some sense, like life from the dead. Another immense advantage of abstinence is, that the longer it is practised its power grows ; and it is very rare for those who have been brought up abstainers to fall away, whereas the security of moderation does not grow with years ; and many of the saddest cases of fall are of those who by little and little have been prepared for the catastrophe. It cannot be denied that the spread of abstinence clears the air and abates temptation. The very dealers in strong drink would wish their children and servants guarded by this armour of proof ; and for every office of trust, where drink was the chief temptation, other things being equal, an abstainer would be preferred. As the temperance reformation spreads, the protecting power of example and of numbers will raise the standard of virtue over the whole country ; and as the undefined, ambiguous, and with all its undeniable escape to many, yet more or less to all, hazardous alternative of moderation is cast aside, the diffusion of freedom and of strength will pervade the whole

community as with a new experience of relief and deliverance. That happy day, I am persuaded, is in the future. Already, amidst dark and heavy shades of sin and sorrow, its dawn is upon the mountain tops ; and when it has fully risen, say, if it shall not, amidst the purity, the safety, the joy of recovered social and domestic bliss, the laugh of innocent childhood, the brightened horizon of youth, and the sober gladness of a great Christian people, become more Christian by self-denial, and more free by self-surrender at once to law and grace—be hailed as one of the most effectual outbursts of human emancipation ; nay more, as a visitation of redemption descending from the throne of God and shining in its light ?

3. The only other feature on which I touch as exalting the means employed by the temperance enterprise, is *largeness of sympathy*. Far be it from me to confine all breadth and depth of Christian or human sympathy within the circle of temperance reformers. There are many—we rejoice to own it—who, if they saw with our eyes, would count no cost and grudge no sacrifice. They are ready for good and noble work in every other field ; they help up to their light in this. Yet must we, true to our own convictions, maintain that there is a visibility of sympathy on the part of those who abstain, which is not so conspicuous elsewhere. It is not in human nature to respond as warmly to the advice of those who, in dealing with the fallen, or those about to fall, take a higher level in order to help them, as of those who come down to their utmost need, and help them to rise or stand by their example. There is a Christian self-denial in this procedure which has won the heart of thousands, and which, with all the shortcomings of individual abstainers, yet puts their cause in the right attitude. We thus endeavour to rally the broken and scattered ranks over which defeat has passed. “Come with us,” we as it were say, “where there

shall be the protection of example, the strength of sympathy, the solace of brotherhood! We shall appropriate your reproach, divide your singularity, veil your weakness, which might have been our own! Like Him who stooped from infinitely greater heights to such sinners as we all are, we shall bear your burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Reject not this hope which is yet left you, this prayer which confirms itself in deed, this upward movement which, with hands joined in ours, will conduct you to the skies! Happy if we save but one of you, though we would save all! And how shall heaven—your heaven and ours—swallow up all thought of sacrifice?" Is not this, brethren, the true voice of Christian love and tenderness; and so long as this stamp is upon this movement, as blessed be God, with all confessed imperfection and failure, it has largely been, is there not a moral grandeur and attraction in this enterprise? Does not the country need it at this day, when so many are perishing in the dark places to which strong drink has driven them, without much visible pity, and when the heart of our nation seems less alive than of old to the cry of suffering and to the inspiration of philanthropy? God forbid that, hardened and barbarised by warfare and a certain deadness to human wants and sorrows, unlike our ancient British nation, the ear of the people, thus indurated, should receive the horrors and agonies of intemperance as a thrice-told tale; but may there be rather a re-awakening to every woe and to every calamity, and may the deep heart of our people be stirred anew, by the tragic doings of this and other sins, to rise in the might of its sympathy and help, and to say effectually with the voice of a national resolve, "This shall no longer be!" And while the nation needs the return and re-kindling of this spirit of unselfishness and nobleness whereby in other days it has sought out the neglected and remembered the forgotten, not less surely does the Christian Church in all its sections need it, somewhat stunned as it is by other domestic calami-

ties, and somewhat wavering in the earnestness and energy of its purpose, to clear the dark places of the earth at home and abroad from the habitations of cruelty with which they are filled ! The Church cannot dispense, in a day like this, when the high and all-commanding truths of a Saviour's infinite love and sacrifice fall on some minds with a sense of dulness and blunted sympathy,—when the pressure of poverty and misery provokes only a deeper descent in some quarters into the degrading abysses of a reckless materialism,—and when the luxury and pride once begotten of prosperity have in other circles rather been frozen up for a season, to break out again in foul and muddy streams with returning sunshine, than dried up and healed in their sources—I say the Church cannot, in such a day, dispense with the elevating, the spiritualizing, the Christianizing influences of the temperance enterprise. We need all our warmth and all our piety, all our devotion to God's glory and man's welfare ; we need all that promotes our national return to truth and righteousness, and our accelerated progress in the career of holiness and of peace. Whatever would throw this temperance cause back—I speak it advisedly—would be a blow to the dearest interests of the Gospel, a depression of its friends, and a setting up of its enemies' right hand. The two are so joined together, and more and more, that the operation that parts them, while fatal to the one, would be sorely adverse to the other. Against such a disaster, and on behalf of their more closely-linked and ever more effectual and fruitful union, we appeal to Him who is Head over all things to His Church, and to all that His Church takes under her shadow. Come, then, thou Mighty One, from whom all greatness in Thy people springs, on whom all goodness in their works depends, send forth Thy servants to this conflict, that in waging it they may be great in the sight of the Lord ! Pull down the strongholds of evil and the thrones of iniquity, which have no fellowship

with Thee ! Cut down the mountain and the wood, and drive out the Canaanites though they be strong, and though they have chariots of iron ! Rebuke our sins and lusts ! Remould our habits ! Reform our commerce ! Renew our laws ! Control our magistrates, and teach our senators wisdom ! Make this great nation a wise and an understanding people ! Turn to Thy Church a pure lip and a faithful discipline ; clothe her priests with salvation, and make her saints to shout aloud for joy ! Gather out of Thy kingdom all things that offend and that work iniquity ; and let there be nothing to hurt or destroy in all Thy holy mountain ! Instead of the thorn, may there come up the fir tree ; and instead of the brier, may there come up the myrtle tree ; and let it " be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off ! " Amen.



